

Je Cherche Fortune: Identity, Counterculture, and Profit in Fin-de-siècle Montmartre

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article se penche sur le quartier parisien de Montmartre durant les années 1880 et 1890. En s'isolant sur le haut d'une colline au nord de la ville, une communauté de peintres et de poètes rebelles quitte le bruyant macadam pour se positionner physiquement et symboliquement au sommet de l'avant-garde anti-bourgeoise. À l'époque, Montmartre est connu pour son héritage subversif, ce qui attire d'autant plus ces jeunes artistes créatifs et passionnés. Leur appropriation d'un espace encore relativement rural aux abords du centre métropolitain de la modernité symbolise leur désir d'échapper aux traditions culturelles étouffantes de leur temps. Les liens entre, d'une part, leur art et leur littérature, et d'autre part, l'expression à la fois intérieure et collective d'une identité culturellement contestataire sont particulièrement révélateurs. Au tournant du vingtième siècle, plusieurs de ces artistes et écrivains sont amadoués par la commercialisation de leur non-conformisme, mais Montmartre n'en demeure pas moins un site mémorable d'influents transgressions sociales et culturelles.

Je Cherche Fortune: *Identity, Counterculture, and Profit in Fin-de-siècle Montmartre*

Nicolas Kenny

Abstract

This paper examines the Parisian neighbourhood of Montmartre during the 1880s and 1890s. Isolating themselves on a hilltop to the north of the city, a defiant community of painters and poets left the busy macadam below to position themselves physically and symbolically at the apex of anti-bourgeois, countercultural sentiment. Known for its subversive character, Montmartre's legacy appealed to these passionate and creative youths, and their appropriation of a semi-rural district on the fringes of the metropolitan centre of modernity symbolized their desire to escape stifling cultural traditions. Particularly revealing are the ways in which their art and literature represented at once a deeply interior questioning of identity as well as a loosely unified movement of cultural protest. By the turn of the 20th century, many of these artists and writers had been tamed by the commercialization of their nonconformity, but Montmartre remains a powerful site for the memory of its influential social and cultural transgressions.

Résumé

Cet article se penche sur le quartier parisien de Montmartre durant les années 1880 et 1890. En s'isolant sur le haut d'une colline au nord de la ville, une communauté de peintres et de poètes rebelles quitte le bruyant macadam pour se positionner physiquement et symboliquement au sommet de l'avant-garde anti-bourgeoise. À l'époque, Montmartre est connu pour son héritage subversif, ce qui attire d'autant plus ces jeunes artistes créatifs et passionnés. Leur appropriation d'un espace encore relativement rural aux abords du centre métropolitain de la modernité symbolise leur désir d'échapper aux traditions culturelles étouffantes de leur temps. Les liens entre, d'une part, leur art et leur littérature, et d'autre part, l'expression à la fois intérieure et collective d'une identité culturellement contestataire sont particulièrement révélateurs. Au tournant du vingtième siècle, plusieurs de ces artistes et écrivains sont amadoués par la commercialisation de leur non-conformisme, mais Montmartre n'en demeure pas moins un site mémorable d'influents transgressions sociales et culturelles.

In the last 20 years of the 19th century, Montmartre's geographic location, on a hilltop high above the centre of Paris, appropriately symbolized the neighbourhood's position at the apex of anti-bourgeois, countercultural sentiment in Europe. "Montmartre, c'est la cime de Paris," suggested one artist who experienced the area's golden age. "C'est un point de vue hautain, à mi-chemin entre les hommes et Dieu."¹ Today most of the eclectic studios and rowdy cabarets that made the neighbourhood famous have either disappeared or been transformed into tourist attractions. In the densely urban streets, it is difficult to picture the fields and trees that gave Montmartre its celebrated rural charm. And yet the romantic appeal of Paris's

18th *arrondissement* remains strong. Every day, tour buses bring in droves of anxious visitors, eager to stroll through the narrow streets of the "Butte," perhaps dreaming of capturing a unique atmosphere created by painters discussing each other's works and absinthe-inspired poets lamenting their broken hearts. While architectural vestiges remain and commemorative plaques abound, the artificiality of luxury hotels and souvenir shops remind us that this special ambience may now exist only on movie screens. Indeed, recent cinematic productions set in that neighbourhood have met with considerable commercial success, indicating the enduring nostalgia for the Montmartre of bohemian artists and demonstrating the extent to which the community succeeded in leaving its mark on the popular culture of the past century.²

Since those halcyon days, visitors and scholars alike have been fascinated by Montmartre's place in turn-of-the-century cultural transformations. As historians Georges Renault and Henri Chateau wrote in 1897, "*Quel sujet . . . plus digne d'une étude historique, si ce n'est Montmartre, la Butte sacrée ?*"³ This paper will examine the connection between the highly charged, urban culture of modernity that swept through late 19th-century Paris, and the construction of identity among a group of enthusiastic young artists and writers who, in rejecting established social and aesthetic norms, sought to position themselves at the vanguard of cultural insurgency. The process of identity formation was twofold, involving, on an interior level, a journey of self-definition for painters and poets confronted with the rigid standards of a state-sponsored, official culture, overseen by a moralizing Third Republic.⁴ More central to this paper is the collective nature of their identity, through which Montmartre has been remembered as a genuine community that boisterously contributed to artistic and literary innovation. Moreover, I will argue that the choice of Montmartre as the playing field for this conflict of cultural identity must be understood as a distinctly urban phenomenon, given meaning by its physical dimension. Along with their stand against the values of the Western world's cultural metropolis, the artists and writers of Montmartre made a territorial claim, embodying the opposition to official culture that brought them together. In the end, however, the massive construction plans initiated in mid-century found their way up the enchanted hill, effacing Montmartre's rural mystique and paving the way for a culture of profit, in opposition to which these professed bohemians had constructed their identity and thanks to which many ultimately built their fortune.

To suggest that Montmartre's artists and writers shared in a collective quest for self-understanding and cultural change presumes that a sentiment of community existed among the cultural figures who lived there in the 1880s and 1890s. The term *community*, however, is admittedly problematic, and indeed it is easily taken for granted in many studies of the district. Certainly, it should not be understood in a formal sense that would imply an officially constituted group with a specific membership and a precise agenda or program governing the formulation of collective decisions and actions. Instead, I use the term loosely to

suggest that while Montmartre's artists and writers had individual aspirations, they were brought together in more than just the desire to set up shop in a place where, compared to the rest of Paris, the air was fresh and the rent was affordable. To be sure, they sometimes formed associations such as the *Hydropathes*, a Left Bank literary organization of some 50 to 100 members, among whom were many of the first writers to settle in Montmartre in the early 1880s. Eclectic coalitions sometimes formed around cabarets, newspapers, or studios, but artists and writers came and went, some making it their home for the duration of their careers, others never really settling down, and still others looking more for thrills and adventure than any real commitment to cultural activity.

What prompts me to refer to these individuals, mostly young men, as a *community*, is their shared ambition to challenge bourgeois artistic, literary, and social norms. For them, officially sanctioned styles of form and content had to give way to innovative methods and new subject matter. As individuals and artists, they defined themselves against established norms and formed a like-minded network, positioned on the margins of the city and its culture. Using this term, as does art historian Phillip Dennis Cate, for example, implies that there was indeed "an implicit unity of radical thought and innovation within the literary-artistic community of Paris."⁵ Artists, writers, and musicians were attracted to the Butte because of the opportunities to exchange ideas and to develop bonds with others who shared their dissatisfaction with the hegemonic culture of the day. There reigned a spirit of friendship and camaraderie coloured as well by tension and debate that favoured interaction among a range of poets and painters. For many of the impoverished artists and poets who lived in exile on this Parisian summit, contact with like-minded colleagues brought a degree of comfort to an often harsh, though self-imposed, life on the margins. As Renault and Chateau explained, the meagreness of their resources accentuated the comfort of gatherings in warm and friendly bars or cafés where they encouraged and inspired each other to persevere with their work.⁶ Artists and writers in Montmartre promoted each other's challenges to the cultural status quo, developing a sense of shared purpose and solidarity among those who sought to subvert everything from the intellectual authority of France's Académies to dominant bourgeois visions of capitalism, morality, class distinction, and gender roles.

To arrive at the connection between the urban culture of Paris and the countercultural identity of Montmartre's bohemians requires an interdisciplinary approach, for as Pierre Bourdieu argues, it is impossible to understand artistic or literary transformations without taking into consideration the way in which artists and writers relied on each other in their bid to challenge dominant cultural norms.⁷ Although Bourdieu is concerned primarily with analyzing 19th-century cultural transformations on a broader scale, his argument against focusing too narrowly on a single literary or artistic tradition can very well be applied to Montmartre. Indeed the creation of this collective identity played itself out in the studios and cabarets where writers and artists collaborated with one another. Referring to one cel-

ebrated cabaret, the illustrator Louis Morin notes that it was "*le rendez-vous de toute la jeunesse chantante et dessinante de Paris. Littérateurs et artistes n'y firent qu'un. Les poètes y gagnèrent des images et, les peintres, des idées, puis ils offrirent leurs oeuvres au grand public.*"⁸

Following Bourdieu's argument that 19th-century cultural transformations must be considered in terms of their transcendence of disciplinary boundaries, it quickly becomes apparent that a pillar of Montmartre's countercultural community was the interaction among artists of all genres and styles. Understanding this dynamic, then, necessitates an examination of varied sources, ranging from accounts and memoirs to poems and paintings. Newspapers such as *Le Chat noir* and *Le Mirliton*, a series of interviews with local celebrities conducted in the early 20th century by writer Jean Émile-Bayard, published testimonies offered by participants and witnesses of Montmartre's glory days, and even a travel guide reveal how the makers of this cultural milieu perceived the community dynamic as well as how they later came to create its memory, venerating or deprecating it in the process. While these are the types of written sources traditionally favoured by historians, I have also sought to incorporate the actual cultural production as well. Historians often limit themselves to descriptive analyses of Montmartre's art and poetry, and as art historian Gabriel Weisberg deplores, "The examination of the achievements of these individuals has been heavily reportorial and devoid of the larger context of the very culture of Montmartre."⁹ Art and poetry were the vehicles through which Montmartre's painters and writers worked out their questioning of identity and culture. As such, they are the sources that best express the tensions at play in the neighbourhood, and careful consideration of a selection of poems and paintings is necessary for a fuller appreciation of the interiority of their authors.

In their work, Montmartre's countercultural artists and writers expressed a common interest in non-academic themes such as urban social problems including poverty and prostitution. Through their appropriation of these issues, they communicated their dissatisfaction with the class and gender norms that both rendered such subjects inappropriate in the bourgeois circles of state-sanctioned cultural production and dictated middle- and upper-class masculine identities. Their experience in Montmartre was marked by an energetically exterior manifestation of their rebellious cultural and social world view as well as a profoundly interior examination of their place within that world. Paris, with its bourgeois salons, *grands boulevards*, and world fairs, was the focal point of the culture against which Montmartre's artistic community was revolting. Not to be outdone, they too gathered in Paris, but in a place that least represented the capital's grandiosity. By appropriating a historically subversive, working-class, and red-light district, these artists and writers forged bonds through their common pursuits, carving out a unique space in the social and urban landscape of *fin-de-siècle* Paris. An unidentified sketch in Renault and Chateau's book illustrates these themes. The Butte's shoddy houses stand in the background and in an empty field a tattered musician blesses the union of a painter and a dancer. They are destitute



Georges Renault and Henri Chateau, *Montmartre* (Paris: Flammarion, 1897), 271.

Figure 1: La musique unit la peinture à la danse.

but their defiant marginality and artistic passion bind them in communal bliss.

Fin de siècle

Montmartre's art and poetry were very much products of the tensions that marked the times, making it necessary first to situate the community within its *fin-de-siècle*, Parisian context. It is important to point out that the expression *fin de siècle* represents far more than a simple temporal designation. It refers to a general urban Western European mood or collective state of mind associated with the anxieties and uncertainties of the turning century. At no other point in history had changes in virtually all areas of human endeavour, from science and technology, to politics and economy, to fine arts and culture, seemed so rapid and so monumental. Modern developments in city planning, transportation, heating, and lighting as well as working conditions, leisure time, and popular culture affected people's daily lives, especially in a city like Paris situated at the hub of this change and innovation. As literary scholar Marshall Berman puts it, modernity pours people "into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish."¹⁰ The uncertainty generated by this cultural and social turmoil resulted, for many people, in a new way of seeing not only the world in which they lived, but also their very selves in relation to the mutations of their environment, creating a palpable mood that historians have since been divided in interpreting. Romantic visions of a giddy *belle époque* stand in sharp contrast with sombre depictions of social turmoil, but it is in the tension between these views that Montmartre is most appropriately situated.

On one hand, and to borrow Walter Benjamin's famous phrase, Paris was undoubtedly the capital of the 19th century when it came to having a good time. Across the city, men and women, rich and poor, were attending various theatres and café-concerts. Historian Roger Shattuck called the period the "banquet years," and his description of the era distinctly evokes the bubbling excitement associated with the notion of *belle époque*. This "gaiety," he argues, resulted from a "theatrical aspect of life," a "light-opera atmosphere" in which "living had become increasingly a special kind of performance presided over by fashion innovation and taste."¹¹ The very phrase *fin de siècle* came to embody this merriment and served as a sort of buzzword that characterized anything new or slightly risqué.¹² The protagonist of a play produced in 1890 described it best:

C'est un nouveau mot qui dit très bien ce qu'il veut dire. . . . Être fin de siècle, c'est être gai, fantaisiste, insouciant, c'est vivre enfin d'une vie un peu surmenée, un peu . . . surchauffée, si tu veux, mais si amusante ! . . . Il ne s'agit pas d'aller loin, mais d'aller vite . . . Nos pères voyageaient en chaise de poste ; nous, nous voyageons en train éclair . . . De Paris à Paris, voilà le trajet ! . . . Paris fin de siècle ! Tout le monde descend !¹³

For Shattuck, the city's streets had become a stage on which everyone, down to the "street cleaners in blue denim" and "gendarmes in trim capes" wore a costume and performed something. It is easy to see how Montmartre's cabarets and nightclubs became so popular so fast in this joyful context. Indeed, costume and performance were the main attraction, from the *académicien* garb of the Chat Noir cabaret waiters to the ever more revealing getups of *La Goulue* and other famous Moulin Rouge dancers. It also follows that artists sought to capitalize on this effervescence in order to promote their new and controversial visions of how art should be produced and what it should represent. According to Shattuck, it was artists, "more than any other group, who saw their opportunity." During the *fin de siècle*, "All the arts changed direction as if they had been awaiting a signal. Along a discernible line of demarcation, they freed themselves from the propulsion of the 19th century and responded to the first insistent tugs of the 20th."¹⁴

Alternatively, the mood swings of the *fin de siècle* can also be seen as casting upon the period a more sinister shadow of unease and psychosis. Historian Christophe Prochasson, for instance, argues that history's "*fonction euphorisante*" is to be blamed for this "*présentation fallacieuse*."¹⁵ He suggests that *crisis* is a more appropriate term for describing the reality in France during the 1880s and 1890s. Economically, Prochasson argues, the country was suffering from the same troubles that had beset the rest of the Western world since the early 1870s, and politically France and Europe were in the grips of "*la montée d'une force politique nouvelle, le socialisme, en même temps que s'installent quelques habitudes détestables inhérentes au bon fonctionnement de la démocratie républicaine*."¹⁶ Indeed, the bloody repression of the Commune in 1871 (itself a defining feature of Montmartre's history) and the Dreyfus affair at the turn of the century seem to delineate a period of considerable political tension, marked also by such indicators

of instability as the rise of numerous anarchist movements and the perceived threat of a coup d'état by the illusory General Georges Boulanger.¹⁷

Intellectually, the country seemed in crisis as well. Despite a widespread positivist faith in science and progress, many thinkers, writers, and artists developed contradictory values that evinced a more subjective or emotional discomfort with increasingly accepted notions of rational progress made popular by thinkers such as Auguste Comte. French literature specialist Gérard Peylet, for instance, argues that a rejection of positivism constituted perhaps the only unifying tendency among the host of artistic and literary movements that emerged during those years. The ostentatious displays of fashion and the self-conscious performatory style of the day were nothing more than ubiquitous symptoms of shallow profligacy. In the face of rapid transformations, the citizens of the *fin de siècle* had nothing left in which to believe. "*La mentalité fin de siècle se résigne à l'épuisement des forces vitales. Elle est convaincue de la décadence de la civilisation occidentale, sclérosée par son rationalisme, elle est obsédée par le vieillissement de la race. L'homme de la fin du siècle a l'impression d'arriver trop tard.*"¹⁸ This negative vision of the *fin de siècle* sees both the era and the mentality it engendered as a kind of sickness or neurosis. Numerous cultural figures associated with the Montmartre community seemed to look for a way out through religious conversions and mystical experimentation that had an ecstatic effect similar to what many inhabitants of the *fin de siècle* also obtained from substances like morphine and opium.

Is it possible, then, to mediate between these images of a festive golden age on one hand and pessimism devoid of any confidence in the future on the other? Montmartre presents itself as a most appropriate site for balancing these two visions of the period. In fact, in order to assess the cultural significance of Montmartre's artistic and literary community it is necessary to account for both of these *fin-de-siècle* tendencies in the development of a unique group dynamic on the Butte. While their behaviour and way of life clearly demonstrate bohemian, care-free tendencies, the serious work of these artists and writers also sheds light on their deep preoccupation with the troubling uncertainty of the times.

This struggle between the need to rebel from social norms and mores and the desire to contribute to broader cultural impulses was a long-standing problem for 19th-century artists.¹⁹ Their inability to fit into their designated social roles coupled with their anxiousness to express themselves through their art and poetry was intimately tied up with their sense of self and their difficulty in defining their own identities. By the time the *fin-de-siècle* craze had settled in, doling out new challenges to people's understanding of identity, these issues seemed to come to a head in Montmartre. Part of the impulse for young artists and writers to gather on the Butte was the opportunity it offered to commune with other individuals who shared the same preoccupations and difficulties fitting into the world to which they were supposed to belong. Most striking about the diverse cultural production of *fin-de-siècle* Montmartre is the extent to which it addresses fundamental themes that relate to selfhood such as

class, gender, and sexuality, all the while continuing to build on the neighbourhood's reputation as the epitome of pleasure, entertainment, and sexual licence.

Montmartre

Living out this tension between the pressure of belonging to a certain social and cultural order and wanting to shape its changing parameters required a physical distance from the epicentre of the cultural *bouillonnement* of the times. As a result, the process of Montmartre's intellectual separation from the heaviness of the cultural climate in *fin-de-siècle* Paris also involved a highly meaningful manipulation of the physical space in which these artists operated. Though relatively close to the lively centre of the French metropolis, Montmartre's topographical situation ensured that just the right distance remained between the supposed world of official culture and those who claimed a desire to transform it. The district itself, north of the city centre, was physically split into two very different sections. Lower Montmartre had been annexed in 1790, but the area located higher up the hill officially became part of Paris only with the demolition of the city's fortifications in 1860, at the height of Baron George Haussmann's ambitious project of urban renewal. The remodelling of Paris by Napoleon III's prefect of the Seine remained a controversial endeavour, and Montmartre long maintained an identity independent of the city into which it had been amalgamated. Even after annexation, Montmartre retained the atmosphere of the independent village it had been since the days of the *ancien régime*. Not immediately included in Haussmann's urbanisation plans, which remained focused on the city centre, upper Montmartre was characterized by its narrow streets and small buildings as well as by the open fields, trees, and windmills that bestowed upon it an almost rural appearance. This began to change as Paris attracted an ever-increasing number of workers during the second half of the 19th century. Montmartre's population increased rapidly, reaching approximately 225,000 by the mid-1890s.²⁰ The district was populated primarily by artisans employed by small proprietors as well as by workers of nearby suburban textile, metallurgical, and petroleum-based industries.²¹

As the neighbourhood's image and identity became more closely associated with its countercultural side, artists and poets of Montmartre increasingly emphasized the distinction between lower and upper portions of the 18th *arrondissement*. Though the name *Montmartre* and the term *Butte* are used interchangeably, the Place Blanche and Place Pigalle were areas of lower Montmartre that attracted the bourgeois dandies who populated Haussmann's boulevards in the 19th century. The self-styled bohemian artists, however, were proud to preserve the sinewy hilltop of upper Montmartre, the Butte that overlooked the city, as their exclusive domain. Accordingly, scholarly consideration of the district often approaches it in light of its antagonism with the capital, but the contrast between Montmartre's artistic community and the rest of Paris should not be seen as strictly binary. For Montmartre's exclusivity to be meaningful, bourgeois Paris had to serve as its foil, and the Butte cannot be isolated from the very real implications of its location, both literal and symbolic, on the city's fringes.

"The spirit of Montmartre," posits Cate, "was not, and could not be, confined by geography,"²² but it must be acknowledged that the physical reality of the neighbourhood was intimately connected to the development of the artistic community's sense of cultural subversion. A much-touted analogy for Montmartre's fresher, more dynamic cultural atmosphere was its rural character, standing in sharp contrast to the urban nature of *fin-de-siècle* modernism, which found its most visible expression in Paris's bustling cultural life. While Haussmann's transformations were creating a new boulevard culture, "bringing enormous numbers of people together . . . to make the new Paris a uniquely enticing spectacle, a visual and sensual feast,"²³ Montmartre was largely spared by the baron's construction crews. At the turn of the century, one observer noted, "The Butte, the real Montmartre, seems at first view to be one-half country village and one-half large provincial town . . . one would believe himself more than two hundred miles from the metropolis . . . [It] is in Paris but not of it." Dwelling on the pastoral charm of "its myriad lilac, horse-chestnut and acacia clusters," he plays on the link between Montmartre's rural character and the artists' free-spiritedness. "The spirit of nature that with soft music is bursting the bonds of winter, and the spirit of the artist, spontaneous, impulsive, capricious, and free, are in absolute accord. One breathes contempt for prudery and custom with the very air. Nature's upward-rushing sap and the artist's careering fancy alike defy repression."²⁴

Urbanization projects had already made the famed Quartier Latin uninhabitable for the artists and writers who, earlier in the century, had lived there in search of alternatives to official culture, explaining in part their migration to Montmartre. Renault and Chateau point out that the Left Bank neighbourhood had been transformed "*sous la pioche des démolisseurs qui l'ont émondé de ses antiques ruelles propices au recueillement des artistes, et favorables aux bourses légères*" while Montmartre remained a "*quartier resté village, où tout le monde se connaît, où l'on peut descendre en pantoufles, fumer la pipe sur le pas de sa porte ou en bras de chemise à sa fenêtre, et où la vie est encore, relativement, à meilleur marché que partout ailleurs*."²⁵ As Pierre Mac Orlan recalled, "*La vie montmartroise s'immobilisait curieusement en marge de l'agitation parisienne*."²⁶ This aspect of life in the neighbourhood became a defining attribute of the Montmartrois identity. "*C'est en effet pour son caractère encore champêtre que Montmartre a été choisi comme asile par tant de jeunes hommes renonçant au monde par fière honnêteté et par amour de l'art*," suggested renowned painter Adolphe Willette.²⁷ Following Berman's interpretation, "the man in the modern street" of Paris had to "become adept at *soubresauts* and *mouvements brusques*, at sudden, abrupt, jagged twists and shifts—and not only with his legs and his body, but with his mind and sensibility as well."²⁸ The modernity of urban life was intense and agitated; artists in Montmartre, however, had found a place that "*a élevé l'âme de ses favoris en leur permettant d'étudier, de produire, de méditer loin du bruit et des soubresauts du cœur de Paris*."²⁹ While the rest of the city seemed to succumb to a sense of confusion resulting from such rapid change, the Butte, as the photograph below illustrates, offered a less frenetic refuge.



J. Milner, *The Studios of Paris* (New Haven, CT: Yale U., 1998), 156.

Figure 2: The Moulin de la Galette and Montmartre's rural character, circa 1900.

Thus Montmartre's material distance from Paris was intimately linked to its social and cultural aloofness, a distinction that clearly predated its image as a *fin-de-siècle* countercultural hotspot and attracted the young creators who recognized themselves in the neighbourhood's independent spirit. In 1871 Montmartre had been the site of the revolutionary uprising known as the Paris Commune, which ended in a painful week of bloodshed as Adolphe Thiers's troops massacred an estimated twenty thousand insurgents. By the 1880s, Montmartre became known to Third Republic officials as a kind of "delinquent community." In addition to holding the area's inhabitants responsible for the violent legacy of the Commune, both state and church officials saw Montmartre as the embodiment of the "immorality of the revolutionary tradition."³⁰ In fact, this largely influenced the controversial choice of the Butte as the site for the new Sacré-Coeur basilica, an imposing and provocative building, symbolically charged as the representation of the "*vœu national*" to expiate the country's sins.³¹ Though intended as a direct message to the offending neighbourhood, the presence of the church seemed only to strengthen Montmartre's resolve to maintain its radical identity. As a result of its defiant character, suggests historian Alexander Varias, this area of the city quickly inscribed itself within Parisian revolutionary history "and, through the mere mention of its name, could arouse emotions approaching those surrounding the Bastille or place de la Révolution."³² The following stanza, taken from Camille de Sainte-Croix's "*La Commune des lettres et des arts*" demonstrates how Montmartre's artistic community was conscious of the neighbourhood's rebellious heritage and saw it as a rallying point for their countercultural projects.

*Jeunes gens au teint pâle et triste
Nous qui n'avons pas de talent,
Nous à qui l'éditeur résiste,
Nous pourquoi le succès est lent*

Rompons enfin le joug inique
De la Presse et de l'Institut
A nous le pétrole et la trique
Faut que ça finisse! Chahut !
A nous gloire et fortune !
Massacrons les bidards
Et faisons la Commune
Des lettres et des Arts ^{J33}

The poem, which goes on to predict that the day will come when Montmartre's poets "*règneront sur Paris*," reads like a revolutionary call to arms. Satirizing what, for many, must have been frequent editorial rejections of their work and denigration of their talent, St-Croix's cry for resistance and incitement to break the iniquitous yoke in Communard fashion would certainly not have been lost on his fellow Montmartrois.

Montmartre's subversion was by no means limited to its radical or anarchist political tendencies. Even more central to the quarter's image were the many dance halls and bars frequented by a varied clientele that always included criminals and prostitutes. Montmartre's location, until 1860, outside of the city's excise tax limits had already contributed to its festive reputation, and its cheap wine made it a favoured Sunday afternoon destination for many workers and petit bourgeois alike. In establishments like the Moulin de la Galette, made famous by painters like Renoir and Toulouse-Lautrec,³⁴ workers and their families sought diversion from the stress of daily life while artists and writers discussed and elaborated upon the countercultural ideas that shaped both their sense of self and their challenge to hegemonic forms of artistic and literary expression. *Fin-de-siècle* consumers of popular entertainment became increasingly curious about what was happening far atop that mysterious hill, and amusement venues of all sorts—from the dingiest, most ephemeral cabarets to the still-successful Moulin Rouge—sprang up to welcome them.

Thirty-five years earlier, a poet and art critic with whom Montmartre's bohemians were very familiar had urged that writers and artists open their eyes to the "*spectacle de la vie élégante et des milliers d'existances flottantes qui circulent dans les souterrains d'une grande ville - criminels et filles entretenues*." Charles Baudelaire's influential argument that being modern entailed finding beauty in an urban underworld of prostitutes and criminals helps relate Montmartre's countercultural personality to the artists' and poets' collective yet personal quest for self-understanding. By living and working in an area known to be a hotbed of anarchy, criminality, and prostitution, and by choosing to make the low-brow nature of their surroundings the focus of their lives and work, Montmartre's poets and painters rejected the public and official subjects of military victories and political heroism that characterized conventional, Academic art, adopting instead the "*sujets poétiques et merveilleux*" of which "*la vie parisienne est féconde*."³⁵ To be sure, class distinctions persisted in Montmartre, and the community remained a primarily masculine domain where working-class women were muses and models but were rarely recognized as artists or poets in their own right. In a turbulent *fin-de-siècle*

world, these artists wanted away from glorious battlefields and bourgeois salons. Their decisions to forsake the stifling norms that regulated social interaction and to position themselves in the wild and dangerous streets of the poorest slums speaks to their profound desire to arrive at new understandings of their place in a modern French society. Sufficiently undeveloped to offer a refuge from the busy streets of Paris, but close enough to the centre to embody the depravity of urban life decried by Third Republic purveyors of official culture and morality, Montmartre was the perfect destination. In virtually every aspect of its role in the Parisian landscape, the Butte offered an ideal setting for troubled but talented young men of bourgeois extraction to discuss and reflect upon the questions of identity raised by *fin-de-siècle* modernity.

Painters and Poets

So wide-ranging and diverse was Montmartre's cultural production that selecting which individuals best reflected the community's response to these pressures of modernity requires difficult choices. As the Butte's most famous bohemian institution, Rodolphe Salis's Cabaret du Chat Noir stands out as the focal point of the community's countercultural project. In 1881, a downtrodden Salis had the idea of creating a gathering place for fledgling artists and writers to share and promote their work. "*Sachant bien que tous les arts sont frères*," the poet Émile Goudeau wrote of Salis's decision to found his cabaret, "*il se demanda pourquoi les littérateurs ne viendraient pas s'adjoindre aux peintres, pour leur prêter quelques syllabes volantes, peut-être ornées de rimes sonores*."³⁶ Self-consciously and exuberantly anti-bourgeois, Salis "*songea à réintroduire le tumulte, la folie haute, et la chanson bardée de fer dans nos mœurs édulcorées*."³⁷ During its heyday, there developed an atmosphere of fraternity and exchange at the Chat Noir, reflecting the interdisciplinary attitudes to artistic and literary innovation that solidified the bonds among the cabaret's patrons. Painters listened to the writers' and singers' poetry readings and musical performances while the latter contemplated the artwork that decorated the establishment's walls. "*Ils vivent dans une parfaite communion d'esprit et d'idées*," recalled one of the cabaret's regulars.³⁸

An evening at the Chat Noir generally consisted of impromptu performances of songs and poems. These acts could touch on any theme and ran a gamut of styles from the sentimental to the macabre, but usually derided the bourgeoisie and often contained insults to prominent members of the affluent classes.³⁹ Underscoring these satirical attacks was a distinctive brand of humour called *fumisme*, whose acerbic irony and irreverence could generate a certain nervousness, though never quite dampening the merriment and carousing that accompanied the show. "*On but sérieusement, on chanta à démolir les murailles*," recalled Goudeau.⁴⁰ Representative of the *fin-de-siècle* atmosphere in Paris, a cloud of chaos was omnipresent at Chat Noir soirées. "*Basse, étroite et enfumée*," according to poet Louis Marsolleau's description, "*la salle sans cesse pleine de clameurs jetait sur le trottoir, quand la porte s'ouvrait, une bouffée de vacarme. Là-dedans, tout était pêle-mêle, les poètes et le public, la troupe et les spectateurs*."⁴¹ Salis himself was instrumental to the animation of the evenings and the popularity of

the cabaret. His sharp wit coupled with an ostentatious use of Parisian slang made his introductions of performers and his monologues a hit among patrons. Revered writer Maurice Donnay later remembered, "*Le boniment Salis avait des dons véritables et de la verve, de l'invention, de l'à-propos. Son discours était une mosaïque d'archaïsmes et de néologismes, d'argot et de citations littéraires, il avait des trouvailles d'expression, des chocs d'idées, des heurts de mots, des images bouffonnes, du panache et de la grandiloquence.*"¹⁴²

Salis ran the operation with a flair that made him known throughout Paris, while Goudeau edited the weekly newspaper of the same name. Founded just one month after the cabaret's grand opening, *Le Chat noir*, proclaiming itself "*l'Organe des intérêts de Montmartre*," brought the cabaret's *fumiste* style of cultural protest to newsstands across the city while reinforcing Montmartre's professed isolation from Paris. In the very first issue, writer Jacques Lehardy exclaimed that "*Montmartre est isolé, parce qu'il se suffit à lui seul. Ce centre est absolument autonome*," he wrote, condescendingly referring to a "*petite ville située à une grande distance de Montmartre et que les voyageurs nomment Paris*."¹⁴³ Further emphasizing Montmartre's detachment from the metropolitan centre, the paper published the reports of "A'Kempis," pseudonym for Goudeau who had been assigned as "foreign correspondent" to Paris. In 1884, Salis even ran for municipal election on a *fumiste* platform that called for Montmartre's political independence. "*Électeurs*," clamoured his advertisements, "*Qu'est-ce que Montmartre ? Rien ! Que doit-il être ? Tout ! Le jour est enfin venu où Montmartre peut et doit revendiquer ses droits d'autonomie contre le reste de Paris.*"¹⁴⁴

As the Chat Noir grew in popularity, it attracted an ever-growing clientele, including more and more curious bourgeois, thrilled at the *dépaysement* of such unconventional entertainment. In 1885, with great pomp and circumstance, Salis led his troops in a midnight procession to a larger, more luxurious building. Dressed in extravagant costumes, carrying the various objects and paintings that had decorated the cabaret, and accompanied by musicians and drummers, Salis's many friends followed him down the streets of the Butte. "*Arrivée rue de Laval*," reported the *Courrier français*, "*entrée triomphale. Les tambours battent aux champs ; les crosses retentissent. Un Suisse majestueux, magnifique, ouvre les portes et laisse passer seulement quelques intimes admis à cette entrée en possession ; puis, discours, émotion générale.*"¹⁴⁵ As they paraded, the participants sang a well-known refrain of poet Aristide Bruant's. Published a year earlier, the song must have seemed, to some at the happening, a self-fulfilling prophecy:

*Je cherche fortune,
Autour du Chat noir,
Au Clair de la lune
À Montmartre, le soir !¹⁴⁶*

Despite the joyful allure of the affair, the cabaretier had already made a number of enemies among Montmartre bohemians, who criticized him for abandoning his bohemian principles and making a fortune on the backs of starving artists. Artists and writers who had known and lived for the early Chat Noir's inde-

pendence and loose structure resented the way Salis's cabaret was now becoming a fashionable destination for the Parisian elite. As the poet Léon Xanrof explained, the spirit of camaraderie that had reigned at the cabaret lasted "*jusqu'au jour où le cabaretier Salis, qui exploitait à son profit l'insouciance de ses collaborateurs de hasard, abusa tellement de leur bonne volonté, qu'humiliés d'être ainsi exploités*," they decided to leave. "*Ce jour-là, le Chat noir cessa d'être un rendez-vous d'artistes pour devenir une exploitation commerciale.*"¹⁴⁷ This shift in values at the Chat Noir is itself most indicative of Montmartre's role in modern cultural developments. *Fin-de-siècle* audiences were attracted by the Chat Noir's unusual style of humour and entertainment, and in the context of late 19th-century cultural transformations, found that it responded to their modern desires for cultural novelties, escape from the predictable routine of daily life, and forms of amusement that provided immediate sensory gratification. The cabaret offered patrons a coveted sense of renewal while the tempestuous unpredictability that initially defined the establishment's proceedings echoed modernity's characteristic sense of uncertainty and tumult. "*Passant, sois moderne !*" read a fitting signboard installed above the cabaret's front door.

The Chat Noir's boisterous character had arisen from the spontaneity of its members. Satisfying a new clientele that was paying for a specific form of entertainment, on the other hand, required a fixed program of songs, poems, and the reputed shadow theatre performances, which had to guarantee customers' enjoyment. To the chagrin of many "originals," including Willette, this shift further emphasized the turn from "*l'ancien Chat noir*," where "*les soirées ne suivaient aucun programme, on attendait tout de l'imprévu, de l'imprévu si amusant. . .*"¹⁴⁸ In contrast, the second Chat Noir "*n'avait plus rien du caboulot lyrique et débrillé. C'était devenu une maison d'art et de grand art.*" With its "*salle de spectacle aux sièges numérotés, café, restaurant, garçons vêtus en académicien, rien ne manqua.*" As writer Louis Marsolleau put it, "*Le second Chat noir renia complètement le premier comme un fils devenu opulent et qui a reçu de l'éducation, méprise son père demeuré pauvre et malappris.*"¹⁴⁹

One of these Chat Noir dissidents was the young poet Aristide Bruant, sometime office employee and rising star of café-concert stages. Bruant stayed behind in Salis's old building to open a cabaret of his own, Le Mirliton, which had as its gimmick the owner's abrasive and caustic style. Inspired by his participation in the Franco-Prussian war and his witnessing of the Commune, Bruant's anti-bourgeois vehemence coloured his method of animating soirées at his cabaret. As clients walked in the door, Bruant would hurl the most vile insults at them, calling the men pimps, the women who accompanied them whores, and ridiculing their appearance in his characteristic slang.

The primary attraction at Mirliton soirées was Bruant's declamation of his poems and songs that depicted the harsh realities of working-class life in Paris as well as the solidarity among the most destitute members of the underprivileged classes. Set in the city's roughest neighbourhoods, including Montmartre, the songs narrate the tragedy of people's lives as they degenerated

under the pressures of alcohol, prostitution, theft, and murder. As historian Harold Segel points out, Bruant's use of the first person and authentic *argot* made his songs particularly striking to his listeners. "Instead of singing *about* the wretched and the criminal, Bruant assumes the personae of the . . . social outcasts who crowd the stark canvas of this other Paris."⁵⁰ Though Bruant himself came from a relatively comfortable background, his family had fallen upon hard times, nourishing his sympathy for the miseries of the social pariahs who inspired his work. His verse is an excellent example of how members of Montmartre's artistic and literary community approached issues of class and sexuality in their questioning of the themes that shaped changing modern conceptions of identity. One of Bruant's most popular and harshly evocative songs was "À Montpernasse," which tells the gruesome story of an ageing prostitute whose *souteneur* murders her after he finds out she had been stealing from him in order to purchase liquor.

*En vieillissant a gobait l'vin,
Et quand j'la croyais au turbin,
L'soir, a s'enfilait d'la vinasse,
À Montpernasse.*

*Pour boire a m'richait su' l'gâteau,
C'est pour ça qu' j'y cardais la peau
Et que j'y ai crevé la pailasse
À Montpernasse.*⁵¹

Although the Mirliton remained smaller than the Chat Noir, Bruant's cabaret also demonstrated the type of artistic and literary interaction behind the formation of a countercultural community in Montmartre. Most revealing is the relationship between Bruant himself and the aristocrat-turned-bohemian painter Henri-Marie-Raymond de Toulouse-Lautrec Montfa, heir of an influential family dynasty that traced its ancestry to the eighth century. As a child he had suffered from poor health and was plagued by brittle bones in his legs. The young Henri was unable to partake in the manly and aristocratic activities like riding and hunting with which his father felt he should identify. Instead, Lautrec found refuge in his artistic talent, and even before his arrival on the Butte, he had begun to reject the rigidity of France's class structure by studying to become a professional painter—an occupation considered unfit for a man of his standing who would normally have engaged in artistic pursuits only for the sake of passing time. As he continued his search for self-understanding, Lautrec gave up his ambition to undertake Academic training. Climbing up the Butte in search of adventure and experience, he found himself "descending" into a world of illustration and commercial art. Focusing on city themes and social problems, Lautrec concentrated mostly on individuals in their urban setting, presenting a unique perspective on life in his new neighbourhood's streets and "documenting" his "allegiance to values preached not by his aristocratic father but by the newly befriended Aristide Bruant . . . Montmartre's bohemia appeared to have triumphed over the genealogy of Toulouse-Lautrec Montfa."⁵²

The association between the two men is most widely remem-

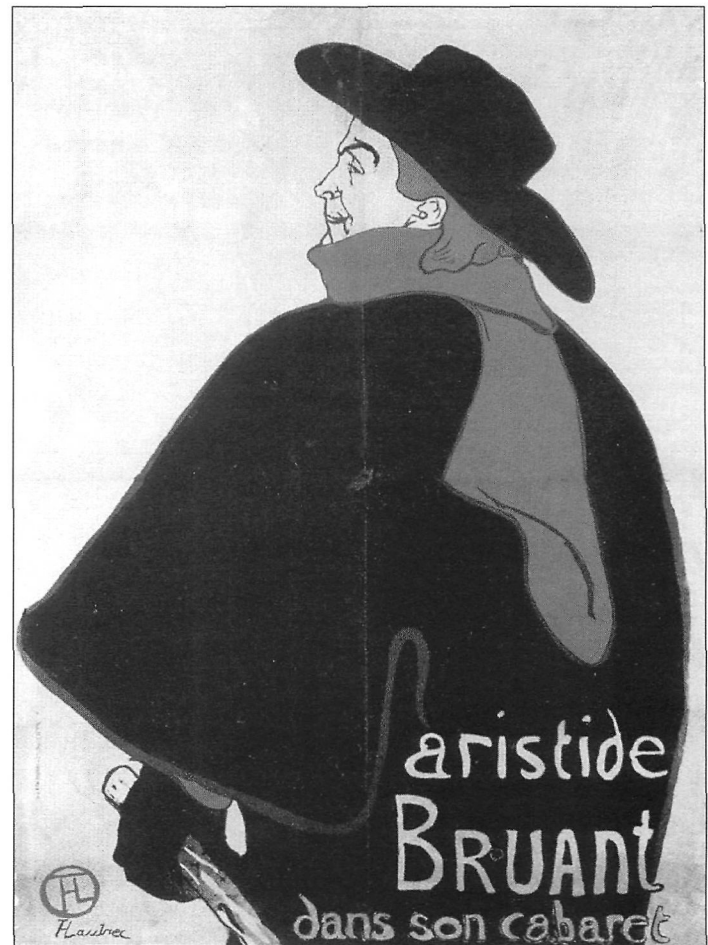


Figure 3: Toulouse-Lautrec, Aristide Bruant dans son cabaret, 1893, colour lithograph, 127 cm x 95cm.

bered for Lautrec's famous posters of 1892 and 1893 which advertised Bruant's performances. But in the mid-1880s, before either of them had achieved any measure of fame, Lautrec produced a series of paintings, primarily portraits, that graced the walls of the Mirliton and the cover of Bruant's journal. Lautrec's paintings were directly inspired by Bruant's poetry, adding striking visual form to his friend's powerful stories. One stirring example imparts to viewers the chilling sensation provoked by the last two stanzas of Bruant's "À Montrouge," first published in 1886.⁵³

*C'est Rosa . . . j'sais pas d'où qu'a vient,
Alle al'poil roux, eun't têt' de chien . . .
Quand a'passe on dit v'la la Rouge,
À Montrouge*

*Quand a'tient l'michet dans un coin,
Moi j'suis à côté . . . pas ben loin . . .
Et l'lend'ain l'sergot trouv' du rouge
À Montrouge.*⁵⁴



R. Heiler, *Toulouse-Lautrec: The Soul of Montmartre* (Munich: Prestel, 1997), 28.

Figure 4: Toulouse-Lautrec, *À Montrouge (Rosa la Rouge)* 1886, oil on canvas, 72 cm x 49 cm.

Lautrec's painting of the same title does not so much narrate the murder of Rosa's client as evoke the promiscuity and danger that characterized life in Montmartre. In the scene, Rosa is standing by a wall. There is light coming from the window, but she is outside, in the shadows, the tones of which are distinctly red to evoke the bloody atmosphere of Montrouge, a working-class district located just south of Paris. Rosa, whose red lipstick alludes to the nature of her profession, looks dishevelled and tired, with her dirty blouse hanging out of her skirt, her sleeves rolled up, her unkempt red hair hanging over her eyes, and her slouching posture. She is leaning forward slightly and expectantly glancing to her left. It is unclear whether she is awaiting another client or if she is hiding from her sinister "protector." Either way, her despondent demeanour, along with the sombre lighting around her, creates a remarkable tension that echoes Bruant's ghastly words.

This type of collaboration between poet and painter demonstrates the ideas and desires that marked Montmartre's

participation in the momentous cultural transformations of *fin-de-siècle* France. Bruant and Lautrec had both been brought up in echelons of society higher than those of the people who so fascinated them and had sought to escape toward what they felt would be a more liberated existence. Like so many others, they found in Montmartre both the inspiration and support for their desire to address controversial issues that were nevertheless deeply connected to 19th-century definitions of social, economic, moral, and intellectual identity. By seeking out a world that in many ways represented the complete antithesis of their own, Montmartrois personalities like Bruant and Lautrec were challenging the fundamental cleavages that delineated social relationships, and were expanding their own self-understanding beyond the confines imposed upon people of their particular ranks.

Profit on the Butte

The examples of the Chat Noir and Mirliton demonstrate how, by creating this community, the artists and writers of Montmartre joined forces in their project of artistic and cultural renewal. However, if their tendency to work toward the rejuvenation of French culture reveals a modernizing outlook, it must nevertheless be reconciled with the determination we have seen to remain socially and physically isolated from the very centre of 19th-century modernity. Indeed, Montmartre may seem blatantly contradictory in its simultaneous and profound commitment to both a modern project of social and cultural change as well as to a clearly anti-modern resolve to flee the urban centre to a less-developed periphery. It must be pointed out, however, that anti-modernism does not necessarily imply an outright rejection of all modern values. Instead, it has been argued that being anti-modern is to accept the challenges of modernity while reproaching its pernicious effects and seeking inspiration in the memory of an earlier, perhaps imagined, time when life seemed much simpler. "We might even say that to be fully modern is to be anti-modern," suggests Berman.⁵⁵

Historian T. J. Jackson Lears was among the first to explore this idea, noting that the 19th century created a feeling of "overcivilization" leading to a "dissatisfaction with modern culture in all its dimensions: its ethic of self-control and autonomous achievement, its cult of science and technical rationality, its worship of material progress." Lears suggests that anti-moderns restively longed for "a freshening of the cultural atmosphere" to compensate for a society that seemed "not only overcivilized but also curiously unreal."⁵⁶ Here again, Montmartre's bucolic ambiance stood in sharp contrast not only to the frenetic urban development below, but also to the sense of cultural heaviness or "over-civilization" that young bohemians associated with the metropolis. Much as Haussmann's macadam seemed to choke the air from the districts it boldly paved over, so did the institutional and regulated nature of official French art and literature seem to stifle the creativity of many youths, trapped also by the class and gender conventions of their day. For a true cultural renewal, the rules that made a working-class, nightlife district like Montmartre disreputable had to be left down in the *grands boulevards*. The air was cleaner in the neighbourhood that Montmartre's bohemians adopted and it was the same fresh-

ness they wished for the artistic and literary ideas they elaborated upon. Salis, Bruant, and Lautrec were modern in their new and innovative work, but the criticism of bourgeois society that shone through their cabarets, poems, and paintings reflected a nostalgic anti-modernism, a profound dissatisfaction with the present, a desire to create a better future by stepping back and examining the very sources of what defined their respective senses of self and community.

But the Butte's exceptionalism was not to last and what they were escaping quickly caught up to Montmartre's bohemians. Apparently, the community's willingness to challenge "respectable" perceptions of social values awakened similar desires among many other bourgeois, who, by the late 1880s, began to take over Montmartre's nightspots in search of transient escape from the pressures of their own more or less conformist lives. The distance between the Butte and the capital was shrinking, and Montmartre was becoming a victim of its own success, transformed into a playground for the bourgeois world it had so passionately renounced. Many of the community's original bohemians were disgusted by the licence and abandon of the new *boîtes de nuit*, complaining that wholesome amusement and joyfulness had given way to incongruous noise and neurosis.⁵⁷ Already a sense of loss was setting in as many who longed to keep up the distinction feared that Montmartre was heading the way of the Quartier Latin. Writer and illustrator turned doomsayer Georges Auriol predicted that an American like Rockefeller or Carnegie would, in the name of progress, demolish the neighbourhood's famous Place du Tertre, which has since become the centre of Montmartre's tourist activity. Noting an increase in construction projects and lamenting the decline of Montmartre's rural character he added, "*La ville de Paris aura perdu cette dernière fleur qu'elle pouvait mettre à sa boutonnière. Et la Place du Tertre méritera définitivement le nom d'Autobusville.*"⁵⁸

Just as Salis had transformed his cabaret into a profitable enterprise, Bruant also became a star, performing on prestigious stages across Paris and Europe, eventually retiring to a country estate. Lautrec's popularity grew along with the increasing bourgeois attraction to the Butte, and he continued to paint prolifically, turning his attention to advertisements and canvases depicting the new and sensational Moulin Rouge and its cancan dancers. One of his most famous portrayals of the dance hall indicates just how far he had moved from his preoccupations with the plight of the urban underclass. Though he continued to paint scenes of Montmartre's nightlife, the elegant and distinguished characters of *Au Moulin Rouge* are worlds apart from his Rosa of just nine years earlier. By 1895 his attention had turned to a much worldlier Montmartre of top hats and fancy dresses.

At the turn of the century, the image of rebellion in Montmartre had become such a successful commercial commodity that the neighbourhood had all but lost its countercultural aura. In a dissertation on this topic, art historian Howard Lay offers a perceptive explanation of how the characteristics that had made Montmartre unique were appropriated by a rapidly expanding culture of consumption. In the dissolute culture of the *fin-de-*



Figure 5: Toulouse-Lautrec, *Au Moulin Rouge*, 1895, oil on canvas, 123 cm x 141 cm.

siècle, he argues, "Opposition itself had been reified and transformed to conform to the laws of consumption." Attitudes that differentiated Montmartre—"political intransigence, resistant popular tradition and common vice"—had been commercialized, making the Butte "the local extension of a pattern of socio-cultural exchange in which the Parisian bourgeoisie played out its fantasies of liberation (of whatever variety) through contact . . . with marginalized culture."⁵⁹

To be sure, subsequent generations of artists, led into the new century by Picasso, would also find inspiration on these Parisian heights. But priorities were shifting and the growing tourist industry was becoming an ever-greater preoccupation for cabaretiers and artists who had something to sell. In 1900, the poet Victor Meusy, with the help of numerous other prominent Montmartrois, produced a *Guide de l'étranger à Montmartre* to attract visitors already in Paris for the world's fair. Surprisingly, it was one of Montmartre's very first *fin-de-siècle* bohemians, Goudeau, who wrote the preface to this commercial publication that in many ways confirmed the shift in values atop the Butte. His message seems to betray a hint of resentment, however, as he recalls the happy, poorer days of "*il y a vingt ans.*" But, he writes with humour, "*Le pain manquait à Montmartre ainsi que le pantalon quotidien et la redingote hebdomadaire.*" Disdaining this new-found wealth, he continues his biblical satire by adding that Montmartre "*se tourna vers le Veau d'or, et lui fit des excuses ironiques, lestes et gouailleuses.*" The Golden Calf responded by covering "*les Artistes, les Poètes et les Musiciens, d'écus sonnants, de pain quotidien, même de smokings et de souliers vernis.*" And with a final dash of irony, "*Salut, vieux Montmartre, patrie des aigles et des moineaux francs, puissent tes mines d'or prospérer à tout jamais. Ainsi soit-il.*"⁶⁰

Goudeau's resignation points to the reality that Montmartre had changed for good. Indeed, what stands out about the rest of this document is the way it marks the about-face that the rise of consumerism had created on the Butte. Though humorous in its approach, the guide lacks the biting *fumisme* that coloured the Butte's earlier literary exploits. Peppered with poems, illustrations, stories, and descriptions of noteworthy people and places, the guide bills Montmartre as the place to be in Paris. "Huits soirées bien employées à Montmartre vous laisseront de Paris l'impression la plus agréable," suggests the guide.⁶¹ And later, "Montmartre, on l'a dit et on ne saurait trop le redire, est la capitale de la capitale du monde."⁶² Whereas Montmartre's poets had once done all they could to differentiate themselves from Paris, they were now promoting their neighbourhood as an integral part of a captivating city. Less than 20 years earlier, cabarets like the Chat Noir had been the exclusive haunt of a relatively limited circle of like-minded artists and poets, and Salis had gladly turned away any unwanted visitors. Now, Montmartre's doors were wide open to bourgeois travellers and potential customers. The guide is complete with advertisements of businesses bearing such telling names as "Grande pharmacie du XXe siècle" and "Grande pharmacie commerciale," offering coupons for up to 25 per cent off purchases of various miraculous healing products.

But in a sense, cultural rebels like Salis, Bruant, and Lautrec had been ahead of their time. Before most others, they had understood the possibilities of promoting such themes as conflict and escape that accompanied France's turbulent transition toward modernity. "Je cherche fortune," wrote Aristide Bruant, but the search was for something deeper as well. To the great distress of their families, they had congregated in Montmartre in order to shake off the constraints of their respective worlds and to better understand their own identities in confusing times. As young poets and painters, were they to follow the respected traditions of their literary and artistic worlds or nourish the climate of cultural transformation by challenging standards of form and content? As members of different social classes, were they to adopt the roles and mores expected of them or did modernity leave them enough space to rethink their adherence to social norms pertaining to class and sex? By raising and attempting to answer these questions, they successfully tapped into some of the innermost exigencies and longings of their generation. In the process, they created a countercultural community, whose bonds reflected an attachment deeper than physical proximity, but whose collective identity was narrowly connected to its appropriation and manipulation of a unique city space, in which both Montmartre's slower development and its social problems associated with urban poverty were emphasized. As their ideas gained in popularity, they were diluted to satisfy a greater number of potential consumers, and the gap between Montmartre and Paris lessened. Indeed, historian Michael Wilson reminds us, "Mass culture has proven to have a voracious appetite for self-styled rebels and that they are more likely to be tamed by the market than successful at subverting it."⁶³ Yet while it can be argued that the Butte's artists and writers were, to a large extent, tamed by the commercialization of their subversion, Montmartre remains a powerful site for the memory

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V. Meusy & E. Depas, *Guide de l'étranger à Montmartre* (Paris: J. Strauss, 1900), 66.

Figure 6: Rebate coupon for the Grande pharmacie commerciale.

of its influential transgressions, heralds of social and cultural transformations that would mark the 20th century.

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Notes

1. Interview with Louis Morin in Jean Émile-Bayard, *Montmartre hier et aujourd'hui avec les souvenirs de ses artistes et écrivains les plus célèbres* (Paris: Jouve, 1925), 283.
2. A recent collection of essays edited by art historian Gabriel Weisberg provides an in-depth discussion of Montmartre's role in the spectacular expansion of 20th-century popular culture. See Gabriel P. Weisberg, ed., *Montmartre and the Making of Mass Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001). The cinematic productions to which I am referring are *Moulin Rouge* and *Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain*.
3. Georges Renault and Henri Chateau, *Montmartre* (Paris: Flammarion, 1897), ix.
4. For more on the moralizing policies of the Third Republic, see David Harvey, "Monument and Myth," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 69, no. 3 (September 1979); Patrice Higonnet, *Paris: Capital of the World*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); John Kim Munholland, "Republican Order and Republican Tolerance in *Fin de Siècle* France: Montmartre as a Delinquent Community," *Montmartre and the Making of Mass Culture*, ed. Gabriel P. Weisberg (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 15–36.
5. Phillip Dennis Cate, "The Spirit of Montmartre," *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor and the Avant-Garde, 1875–1905*, ed. Cate, and Mary Shaw (New Brunswick, NJ: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1996), 7.
6. Renault and Chateau, *Montmartre*, 258.
7. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Link between Literary and Artistic Struggles," *Artistic Relations: Literature and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Peter Collier and Robert Lethbridge, trans. Elinor Dorday (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 30.

8. Interview with Louis Morin in Émile-Bayard, *Montmartre*, 285.
9. Gabriel P. Weisberg, "Montmartre's Lure: An Impact on Mass Culture," *Montmartre and the Making of Mass Culture*, ed. Weisberg (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 2.
10. Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 15.
11. Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years: The Arts in France, 1885–1918* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958), 3–6.
12. Keith G. Millward, *L'Oeuvre de Pierre Loti et l'esprit « fin de siècle »* (Paris: Nizet, 1955), 20.
13. Ernest Blum and Raoul Toch  , *Paris fin de si  cle : Pi  ce en cinq actes* (Paris: Calmann L  vy, 1890), 32–33.
14. Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*, 15.
15. Christophe Prochasson, *Les Ann  es   lectriques, 1880-1910* (Paris: La D  couverte, 1991), 6.
16. Ibid., 9.
17. For a thorough examination of the cultural and political turmoil of the era see also Richard D. Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Si  cle France* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).
18. G  rard Peylet, *La Litt  rature fin de si  cle de 1884    1898 : Entre d  cadence et modernit  * (Paris: Vuibert, 1994), 26.
19. The most influential study on this topic remains T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984).
20. Renault and Chateau, *Montmartre*, 46. See also Alvan F. Sanborn, *Paris and the Social Revolution* (Boston: Small Maynard, 1905), 282.
21. Alexander Varias, *Paris and the Anarchists: Aesthetes and Subversives during the Fin de Si  cle* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), 15, 29–30. The 18th arrondissement was delineated by the boulevards de Clichy, de Rochechouart, and de la Chapelle on the south, the boulevard de Ney on the north, the avenues de Saint-Ouen and de Clichy on the west, and the rue d'Aubervilliers on the east. Cate, *The Spirit of Montmartre*, 19.
22. Ibid.
23. Berman, *All That Is Solid*, 151. For particularly engaging analyses of how Haussmannization transformed Parisian life see Berman, 148–64, and Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Si  cle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 16–26.
24. Sanborn, *Paris and the Social Revolution*, 273, 275.
25. Renault and Chateau, *Montmartre*, 257.
26. Pierre Mac Orlan, *Montmartre: Souvenirs* (Bruxelles: Chabassol, 1946), 146.
27. Interview with Adolphe Willette in   mile-Bayard, *Montmartre*, 366.
28. Berman, *All That Is Solid*, 159.
29. Interview with Emile Peynot in   mile-Bayard, *Montmartre*, 312 (emphasis mine).
30. Munholland, "Republican Order," 16–17.
31. Symbolizing the disdain many republican Parisians felt for the basilica, a character in   mile Zola's *Paris* refers to it as a "monument d'absurdit   et d'affront" as he plots to dynamite it.   mile Zola, *Paris* (Paris: Trois Villes, 1920), 2:234. Though he makes no reference to Montmartre's artists, David Harvey, in "Monument and Myth," writes an elegant history of the tensions surrounding both the cult of the Sacred Heart and the construction of the church.
32. Varias, *Paris and the Anarchists*, 30.
33. Reproduced in   mile-Bayard, *Montmartre*, 343.
34. For a discussion of the Moulin de la Galette's countercultural traditions, see John B. Collins, "Seeking *l'esprit Gaulois*: Renoir's *Bal du Moulin de la Galette* and Aspects of French Social History and Popular Culture" (unpublished PhD thesis, McGill University, 2001).
35. Charles Baudelaire, "Salon de 1846," *Oeuvres compl  tes de Charles Baudelaire*, ed. Jacques Cr  pet (Paris: Louis Conrad, 1922), 1:196–202.
36.   mile Goudeau, *Dix ans de boh  me*, eds. Michel Golfier and Jean-Didier Wagneur (1885; Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2000), 256.
37. Ibid., 255.
38.   mile-Bayard, *Montmartre*, 27.
39. Steven Moore Whiting, "Music on Montmartre," *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875–1905*, ed. Phillip Denis Cate, and Mary Shaw (New Brunswick, NJ: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1996), 159–98.
40. Goudeau, *Dix ans de boh  me*, 256.
41. Interview with Louis Marsolleau in   mile-Bayard, *Montmartre*, 273.
42. Interview with Maurice Donnay in   mile-Bayard, *Montmartre*, 215.
43. Jacques Lehardy, "Montmartre," *Le Chat noir*, 14 January 1882: 1.
44. Poster reproduced in Cate, "The Spirit of Montmartre," 28.
45. Jules Roques, *Le Courrier Fran  ais*, 11 June 1885. Article reproduced in Anne de Bercy and Armand Ziw  s, *A Montmartre . . . le soir : Cabarets et chansonnier d'hier* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1951), 25–26.
46. Francis Carco, *La Belle   poque au temps de Bruant*, 7th ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), 13.
47. Interview with L  on Xanrof in   mile-Bayard, *Montmartre*, 386.
48. Interview with Adolphe Willette in   mile-Bayard, *Montmartre*, 370.
49. Interview with Louis Marsolleau in   mile-Bayard, *Montmartre*, 275.
50. Harrold B. Segel, *Turn of the Century Cabaret* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 56.
51. Aristide Bruant, *Dans la rue : Chansons et monologues* (Paris: Introuvables, 1976), 1:39–43. In Bruant's poem, the spelling of *Montpamasse* has been changed to *Montpernassee* to indicate the working-class slang pronunciation.
52. Reinhold Heller, *Toulouse-Lautrec: The Soul of Montmartre* (Munich: Prestel, 1997), 22.
53. Gale B. Murray, *Toulouse-Lautrec: The Formative Years, 1878–1891* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 94.
54. Bruant, *Dans la rue*, 97–102.
55. Berman, *All That Is Solid*, 14.
56. T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1929* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 4–5. Although Lears's project focuses on the American *fin-de-si  cle*, he argues that very similar impulses shaped the European mood as well. See also Matt K. Matsuda in "Plays without People: Shadow Puppets of Modernity in Fin-de-si  cle Paris," *Antimodernism and the Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity*, ed. Lynda Jessup (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 192–205.
57. Interview with Paul Brulat in   mile-Bayard, *Montmartre*, 190.
58. Interview with Georges Auriol in   mile-Bayard, *Montmartre*, 170–71.
59. Howard Lay, "La f  te aux boulevards ext  rieurs: Art and Culture in Fin de si  cle Montmartre" (unpublished PhD thesis, Harvard University, 1992), 61.
60. Goudeau in Victor Meusy and Edmond Depas, *Guide de l'  tranger    Montmartre* (Paris: J. Strauss, 1900), 9–10.
61. Meusy and Depas, 11.
62. Ibid., 111.
63. Michael L. J. Wilson, "Portrait of the Artist as a Louis XIII Chair," *Montmartre and the Making of Mass Culture*, ed. Gabriel Weisberg (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 203.